

Camp Currie

The Camp Currie building was started in 1945 and the land was leased from Crown Zellerbach for a dollar a year. Crown Zellerbach donated a 60' cedar log. The log was cut into shake bolts on the river bank with a drag saw and Lonnie Beltz, who owned a Model A with a home made bed on the back end, and Bernie Reese who also had an old car with a box on the back, hauled these shake bolts to Camp Currie. This took many trips. The frame work was lumber from the mill. Blocks were put on the ground in the corners for a foundation. Shakes were split with a fro and Joe Stewart had a friend that lived in Ridgefield, WA, who had a splitting machine and he convinced him to come and split the shakes for free. The shakes were used so as not to sweat and get moldy and let air through.

After the building was done they built the fire place. Mike Paul gave the order from the Crown Zellerbach Mill to use the "digester bricks". The bricks were round and of no further use. Tony Stear who was a mason at the mill built the fire place in two days with Lonnie Beltz as his helper. Mr. Thatcher built the first two outdoor toilets, men and women. Some of the volunteers: Lonnie Beltz, Milt Franklin, Carl Crosby, Dick Lawton, Louie Kersavage, Fisher, Bernie Reese, Joe Stewart, Mr. Ted Freeman, Fred Good, and Lloyd Hutchison.

Camp Currie received its name from a contest. Lloyd Beltz and Audrey Fisher, Jr. tied by naming it "J.D. Currie Youth Camp." Mr. J.D. Currie was an attorney in the town of Camas, a long time elder in the Presbyterian Church, Camas First Citizen, founder of Clarke Masonic Lodge and a respected leader and citizen of Camas.

In 1925 John and Alice Currie's son of 11 years contracted meningitis. Two other boys Bobby Gittings, 7 and Max Haley also contracted meningitis at the same time and all three died. Billy had belonged to a neighborhood gang who were preparing themselves to become Boy Scouts when they reached the age of 12. This was before Cub Scouting had been instituted. Billy's father, in his grief, continued to work with the other boys and a year later obtained a charter to organize a lodge of the Boy Rangers of America.

The Ranger program was designed for boys 8 to 12 and the rituals and activities were based on American Indian Lore. Each lodge was organized into tribes bearing the names of authentic Indian Nations, and each young brave was given a name taken from tribal records. Each started as a papoose and could earn five advanced degrees of prowess. Eagle feathers were awarded for achievements, like merit badges in Scouting, and officers had Indian titles.

Scores of boys were members through the quarter century that J.D. Sponsored the lodge, and many fathers assisted at the weekly meetings and summer camps. At its peak the lodge had a membership of over 60 "wild Indians". Many middle aged local men still have fond memories of their experiences as Rangers and remember with love and respect their adult leader whom they called "Tecumsch," after the famous Shawnee chief.

The present J.D. Currie Youth Camp on Lacamas Lake was named in honor of John Currie who, denied by fate from seeing his own son grown into manhood, was a second father to hundreds of other men's sons, until his own death. I have been told that Dr. A.K. Harris Reverend Phipps and several fathers from the Presbyterian Church were leaders in promoting Crown Zellerbach to donate land for Camp Currie. Crown Zellerbach was more than generous to allow their working employees to work at Camp Currie. They also donated a tremendous amount of supplies.